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Leak rules and other turkeys

Saying he has had it up to his keister with leaks from the White House about budget deliberations, President Reagan has issued rules requiring interviews with White House officials be cleared through the press office. This followed a flap over Chief of Staff James Baker telling a reporter, while they sat in a blind during a turkey shoot, that Labor Secretary Raymond Donovan should resign.

President Reagan may be up to his keister in leaks, but everybody else is up to the keister in presidents trying to forbid conversations between top government officials and the press. About this time in nearly every administration, when things are going sour, somebody tries to clamp a lid on communications. It doesn't work, and it shouldn't.

The same day the new rules went out, there was a leak of testimony by CIA Director William Casey about U.S.-backed forces in Central America committing sabotage. If the President is going to worry about leaks, this is

the kind of thing it is right to worry about. Secret information that bears on national security ought to be protected. Political sniping within the White House may be embarrassing to a President, but it does not justify efforts to squeeze off contact between the White House and the outside world.

If the President's top aides cannot be trusted to talk to reporters when they please, the President's problem is not with the press. It is with the quality of people he has working for him.

As far as conversations in turkey blinds are concerned, anybody who has ever hunted turkey can tell you that those birds have a sense of hearing even more sensitive than a reporter's. The reason you don't want people talking in a blind may be the same reason President Reagan is worried about the effect of leaks on his strange ideas for next year's budget. It might scare all the turkeys off.